



Charter School Annual Site Visit Report
Charter Schools Office
2011-2012

THE EQUALITY CHARTER SCHOOL ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT

MARCH 2012

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

The Equality Charter School is a secondary school serving approximately 233 students in grades 6 through 8 in the 2011-12 school year¹. The school opened in the fall of 2009 and was chartered to serve both middle and high schools grades in its first charter term. The school postponed launching its high school program until fall 2014, by which time The Equality Charter School will be in its renewal year, with its original charter expiring on January 12, 2014. The school is co-located in DOE space with P.S. 160 at 4140 Hutchinson River Parkway East, Bronx, NY 10475 in Community School District 11. The student body includes 77.1% of its students receiving Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL), 22.5% of its students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and 2.6% of its students identified as English Language Learners.²

The school received a C on its first Progress Report in 2010-11, with a C in Progress and Performance and an A in Environment.³ The school's grade 6 Math scores of 45.3% at Level 3 or above was equal to CSD 11's scores; its grades 7 and 8 Math Level 3 or above scores were greater than the district (55.6% at grade 7 to 45.3% and 52.1% at grade 8 to 35.9%). In ELA the results were reversed: the school's scores were below CSD 11 at grades 6, 7, and 8 (24.3% at grade 6 to 37.2%; 25% at grade 7 to 28.1%; and 21.1% at grade 8 to 24.6%).⁴

The school's average daily attendance up to the time of the visit was self-reported to be 96.4%.⁵

The school reported low student attrition, with less than 5% turnover between the end of the 2010-11 school year and February 2012 (7 students not returning at the end of the school year and 4 leaving after the start of the school year). The school also reported a post-lottery waitlist in 2011 of over 400 students.⁶

The Equality Charter School is an independently run charter school.

Annual Review Process Overview:

The New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) Charter Schools Accountability and Support (CSAS) office conducts an annual site visit of charter schools authorized by the NYC DOE. The site visit is designed to address three primary questions: is the school an academic success; is the school a fiscally sound, viable organization; and is the school in compliance with its charter and all applicable laws and regulations? To ascertain matters of sustainability and strategic planning, we also ask about the school's plans for its next charter term. The visits are conducted by representatives of the CSAS and last the duration of one school day. The annual site visit begins with a meeting with the school leadership team. Afterward, the reviewers visit classrooms and hold brief meetings with available administrators and teachers. Areas of evaluation include, but are not limited to: academic goals and mission; curriculum and instruction; school culture and learning environment; assessment utilization; parent engagement; government structures and organizational design; community support; special populations; and safety and security. The site visit is intended to provide a snapshot of the school and reflects what was observed at the time of the visit.

The following experts participated in the review of this school on March 1st, 2012:

- Richard Larios, NYC DOE CSAS
- Laurie Pendleton, Consultant to NYC DOE CSAS

¹ Self-reported on ASV's Data Collection Form, February 2012.

² NYC DOE ATS system data pull, April 2012

³ NYC DOE School Progress Report

⁴ NYC DOE Test Results - <http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/data/TestResults/ELAandMathTestResults>

⁵ Self-reported on ASV's Data Collection Form, February 2012.

⁶ Self-reported on ASV's Data Collection Form, February 2012.

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength:

- The school has a strong committed leadership team and staff that are dedicated to the school's mission and focused on improving instruction in a supportive learning environment.
 - The school principal, Caitlin Franco, worked with the staff to create the school's vision. Teachers interviewed described this process as "very positive." One teacher reported, "I can see my words in the vision." Another reported a huge culture shift with the focus now clearly on academic achievement, sharing, "Drama doesn't go beyond the room because it's not part of the vision." Another teacher shared, "Teachers have bought into the vision and students feel it."
 - Teachers reported that school leaders are open to feedback and this has led to increased positive staff dialogue. Leadership reports a "healthy push-back" on some initiatives. The leadership initiated a 360 feedback evaluation and reported that "everything on the report was 80% or higher."
 - Teachers reported that there are now common language and expectations across the school with everyone on the same page. "Everyone is on the same page. There's accountability, consistency."
 - The school's mission is posted at various sites throughout the school.

- The school has established a system of support based on the three-tier Response to Intervention model to support academic learning and has also provided advanced learning opportunities to challenge students. This model is supported by bi-weekly Student Support Team meetings led by the school's deans, social worker, and guidance counselor.
 - The school has focused on improving tier one or universal instruction through a common lesson planning format and teacher professional development on effective lesson planning among other initiatives. The leadership reports that efforts are just beginning at the tier two level and include:
 - Opportunities for small group instruction through the implementation of the co-teaching model in the English Language Arts and Math classes.
 - Lunchtime small groups including book club, and instructional coaches working with students on both advancement and remediation.
 - Both before and after school groups are in place for students who would benefit from additional support.
 - The school is also focusing on supporting advanced learners through the addition of both Integrated Algebra and Living Environment classes for 8th graders. Academic test scores and teacher recommendations were used to establish the make-up of the mathematics class and students self-selected into the science class that is held during lunch and before and after school. Students will take Regents exams for both classes.
 - The school should continue to work collaboratively with its Committee for Special Education (CSE) to ensure timely and appropriate support for its special education students.

- The school leadership team reported that the academic environment is stronger and more focused than last year. Observed classrooms displayed a consistent approach to instructional practice and showed evidence of focused school-wide initiatives in response to previous year results on state assessments.
 - The co-teaching model was in evidence in observed English Language Arts and Math classrooms. In some rooms one teacher delivered direct instruction while the other supported students. In other rooms, students were engaged in small group work with both teachers and in others one teacher removed a group of students to an area outside the classroom for instruction. The school's co-teaching model integrates Special Education teachers into classroom instruction.

- Teachers interviewed said they had received guidance on the expectations of the co-teaching model. Professional Development was provided in August on the effective use of two people in the classroom at all times and observations regularly report on the effectiveness of planning and implementation. “Expectations are now clear,” according to one interviewed teacher.
 - The majority of classrooms observed had the objective of the lesson posted.
 - Both the leadership team and the teachers spoke at length about the English Language Arts strategy initiative and there was ample evidence of its implementation in classrooms visited. Although fairly new, most rooms showed evidence of common ELA and writing techniques such as TIED (Topic, Introduction, Evidence, Development) paragraphs, SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review), TTQA (Turn The Question Around), etc. Each room had posters of the strategies as learning aids for students. Many classrooms had word walls focused on vocabulary development. Students were encouraged to use different reading and test taking strategies in their work.
- The school displayed an improved professional climate with a targeted, coherent approach to professional development and teacher support and evaluation. To support the focus on academics, the school has added two full-time instructional coaches who conduct classroom observations, provide feedback on lesson plans, and conduct professional development. One area of focus for the Instructional Coaches has been improving the impact and effectiveness of the co-teaching model.
 - Instructional Coaches have day-to-day interactions with teachers, including frequent walk-throughs and feedback, but copy leadership on teacher feedback to ensure consistency. This increased observation, support, and feedback, according to interviewed staff, has led to high levels of accountability.
 - Teachers receive regular feedback on the quality of their instruction. Teachers interviewed on the day of the visit shared that, in addition to formal evaluations, they receive feedback from administrative walk-throughs, as well as detailed feedback on weekly lesson plans. A few teachers interviewed felt the comments and suggestions they receive on differentiation are particularly helpful. Teachers report the “instructional coaches are very helpful” and that the leadership and coaches “hold us to a very high standard”.
 - In addition to support from the leadership team, teachers report frequent peer collaboration, including participation on the school’s required peer observation program. Peers observing each other complete a form that includes feedback on when learning was good and how learning could be made better. According to leadership, after a peer observation the two teachers are expected to share a lunch date shortly after the observation to discuss.
 - The school has hired a consultant to provide feedback on instruction for 2 to 3 days per month and to support the administrative team with strategic planning and other topics, including its eventual expansion to high school grades.
- The student learning environment is safe, respectful, focused and, according to staff and students, greatly improved.
 - The school’s deans reported that data show a 50% reduction in suspension rates from last year and an increase in student attendance from 94.8% last year to 96.4% this year. School leadership attributes this to the use of student advisories for behavioral instruction and relationship building, clear expectations, and the work of the student support team. “Last year the focus was on more serious infractions while this year we focus on handling the little things,” according to school leadership. Teachers report that the Dean’s role is a more proactive support for them. The school added a social worker position to provide additional support for students.
 - The school re-energized its Positive Behavior Supports program, which is now in its third year of implementation, by using the student advisory period, as noted, to teach and re-teach expectations as needed, help students set goals of their own, and strengthening its positive acknowledgement and rewards component, including honoring student of the

- day and quarter, instituting an honor roll that honors students for being a positive role model.
- Teachers and the school's student support team described a referral system for behavior infractions, which includes a team meeting with student and family.
 - The student support team also reviews discipline data to determine the need for re-teaching expectations for behavior. Student support team staff go into Home/Careers class to teach respect and reinforce the matrix of behavioral expectations.
 - Teachers report students are eager to learn which has led to a more respectful environment overall. One teacher interviewed reported that the "school has changed 180 degrees." Another shared that the school's "image has changed both inside the school and outside." One teacher shared, "students, more than last year...want to be here...they are happier."
 - During classroom observations student discourse was friendly and respectful, with students practicing academic dialog and respectfully disagreeing with each other.
 - The school's behavioral expectations are posted throughout the school. However, classrooms observed did not consistently exhibit the four to one praise statements nor was the distribution of PBIS cards regularly observed so the school should continue its work to advance this area of strength.
- Sound fiscal and operational practices have put the school on solid footing and support its focus on teaching and learning.
 - The Director of Finance and Operations stated that the focus of his department is to create "a customer service mindset". He has streamlined various operations systems in an effort to speed up response to staff needs as well as to build in transparency. He reports there are very clear steps to solving various problems and their goal is to get back to teachers quickly with answers. Teachers have recognized these improvements and said their implementation has allowed them to focus on teaching and learning.
 - The Equality Charter School serves a representative student population of students to its community.
 - The school's student population includes 77.1% receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch, compared to 63.3% FRL students in the district. In addition 22.5% of its students have IEPs, compared to a district average of 16.8%. Its English Language Learner population is lower than the district average, 2.6% to 9.9%, and the school should continue to monitor and adjust its recruitment strategies to increase its ELL population to comparable averages with the district⁷.

Areas of Growth:

- The school should continue its efforts to improve the quality of overall instruction toward the goal of improving its academic results, which in 2011 were stronger in Math than ELA. In 2011, the school's NYS Math exam results were at or above CSD 11's results in grades 6 (45.3% at Level 3 or better for school and district), 7 (55.6% at Level 3 or better compared to 45.3% for the district) and 8 (52.1% to 35.9%) but below citywide averages at those grade levels. The school's NYS ELA exam results were below the district's same grade results (6: 24.3% to 37.2%; 7: 25% to 28.1%; 8: 21.1% to 24.6%) at all three grade levels and well-below citywide averages.⁸
 - While steps have been taken to improve the level of rigor in the classroom by providing professional development and feedback during observations, the level of rigor observed was uneven from room to room. In some observed classrooms, the level of questions asked ranged from basic comprehension to higher level questions of various kinds but more often visitors observed questions and answers at the lower levels of complexity. In one observed classroom, an incorrect response wasn't

⁷ NYC DOE ATS system data pull, April 2012

⁸ NYC DOE Test Results - <http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/data/TestResults/ELAandMathTestResults>

corrected or commented upon. In others, questioned students were given insufficient wait time or were not pushed with follow-up questions to explain their thinking or extend their responses. The school should continue to focus its professional development and observational feedback on the quality of questions and discussion management as one way of increasing rigor in all subjects.

- Pacing also varied, from fully engaged and dynamic to classes where students were merely compliant, responsive to teacher directions or instruction but the overall pace of lessons in these classes was sluggish (including do-nows that went on too long, for example) or transitions from instruction to question or activities were slow. The school should consider ways to use its robust observation routines to provide supportive feedback on improving pacing and engagement to a level of consistency with its most effective classrooms.
 - The observed quality of teacher feedback to students was also uneven from classroom to classroom. In some lessons, teachers provided specific, descriptive feedback both in writing and orally to students while in others the feedback was more along the lines of “Good job” or “Yes, that’s right.” Some classes displayed exemplary work with thoughtful feedback included; in others student work was displayed without comment or including only generalized praise. The school should consider ways to improve teacher feedback so that it is more consistent, descriptive, and helpful to learners.
 - Although the objective of the lesson was consistently posted in observed classrooms, quality and specificity varied and sources (textbooks, New York State or Common Core Standards) and alignment weren’t clear from observations and interviews. Further, in some classes the connections between objectives, instruction, and student learning were reinforced during the lesson and with a lesson wrap-up, but this was not typical of observed classrooms. The school should consider ways to use staff and teacher collaboration time to develop a common expectation around quality objectives, verify alignment across grade levels, and how to use them during instruction and in lesson wrap-ups to reinforce or verify student learning.
 - The majority of the instruction observed on the day of the visit was mostly direct instruction in either whole or small group settings. Very few instances of cooperative or project-based learning were observed by visitors.
- The school should continue to improve the use of data to inform instruction and operational excellence.
 - The school streamlined its assessment program, eliminating redundant assessments and focusing on those it believed would be most beneficial to teachers (TerraNova, interim mock assessments for ELA and Math, mid-term and final exams in science and social studies, and two administrations of the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement [KTEA] for special education students) for informing instruction. The feedback from teachers regarding these assessments is very positive, particularly for the interims. They say such things as, “I love the interims” and “we take them very seriously here and “data is broken down very specifically for us.”
 - However, based on observations and interviews it still seemed that planning and grouping decisions were more intuitive or anecdotal than driven by deep data dives into individual student or small group strengths and weaknesses or specifically targeted skills that might be common across students or those unique to some students. The school should build on its progress here to move enthusiasm to ownership and expand to more sophisticated analysis and instructional responses to data.
 - The school administered two interim exams in both ELA and Math modeled on the state assessments, with a third interim still to be administered, yielding data that was useful to determine student groupings and overall areas of focus for instruction. Immediately following the administration of the assessment, they held a data day where the data were analyzed and action plans created.

- When the school receives its state assessment results it should compare student results on NYS Math and ELA tests with student performance on interims to ensure value of interims as a tool for targeting instructional strengths and deficiencies and for predicting performance on the state assessments.
 - As the school continues to refine its assessment system it will also be able to develop its longitudinal data use, better track long-term student achievement, and use results to evaluate curriculum resources and instructional practices for effectiveness.
 - The school is also encouraged to continue to expand how it collects and uses operational data related to parent participation, student recruitment efforts, behavior, and community involvement so that analysis of this data can better support the school in meeting or exceeding its non-academic goals.
- The school should continue to improve the implementation of the co-teaching model and Response to Intervention implementation to increase instructional effectiveness and efficiency.
 - In classrooms observed on the day of the visit, some groups did not appear to be pre-planned nor were they engaged in significantly different work. The school could benefit from implementing more sophisticated flexible grouping allowing for more targeted differentiation and a more effective use of additional instructional resources.
- The school should continue to work to engage its community and parents in the life of the school.
 - Parent, Teacher and Student participation on the DOE School Survey has been higher than citywide averages in both 2010 and 2011. However, satisfaction scores have been mostly average. The school should continue its targeted efforts to improve satisfaction results with all its immediate stakeholders. Preliminary results are encouraging: Mr. Philemy reported that attendance at parent conferences increased from 63% in 2011 to 91% in 2012 and that internal satisfaction surveys have been positive but efforts should be monitored and results on the 2012 School Survey examined when available.
 - The school, through staff and its board, should continue and, if necessary, extend its community outreach efforts to ensure strong local partnerships and positive relationships with important stakeholders like the Community Education Council (CEC) and to ensure the community is aware of the school's efforts and successes to improve its performance and will advocate for the schools and its students.

Part 3: Essential Questions and Accountability Framework

The CSO Accountability Framework

To help NYC DOE authorized charter schools better understand what we mean by success for charter schools, the NYC DOE's Charter Schools Office (CSO) has developed an Accountability Framework build around four essential questions for charter school renewal:

1. Is the school an academic success?
2. Is the school a fiscally sound, viable organization?
3. Is the school compliant with its charter and all applicable law and regulations?
4. What are the school's plans for its next charter term?

1. Is the School an Academic Success?

1a. High Academic Attainment and Improvement

Schools that are academic successes have many of the characteristics below:

- Meet absolute performance goals established in school charter
- Meet student progress goals established in school charter
- Are closing the achievement gap for at risk students, including special needs and ELL students
- Are surpassing performance of DOE identified peer-schools
- Are surpassing performance district and city proficiency or better averages
- Are meeting other rigorous academic and non-academic goals as stated in school's charter

Evidence for success might include, but not be limited to, the following depending on school configurations:

- Grades 3-8 NYS ELA Results (absolute performance, individual student progress, comparative performance to similar schools, home district or city averages, progress for at-risk populations)
- Grades 3-8 NYS Math Results (absolute performance, individual student progress, comparative performance to similar schools, home district or city averages, progress for at-risk populations)
- Grades 4 and 8 NYS Science Results (absolute performance, individual student progress, comparative performance to similar schools, home district or city averages, progress for at-risk populations)
- Grades 8-12 NYS Regent Exam Results
- When applicable, NYSAA or other approved alternate assessments results
- HS 4- and 6-Year Graduation Rates (absolute and progress, overall, for at-risk student populations)
- Grades 8-12 College Readiness Credit Accumulation
- Percentage of Students Applying to and Being Admitted to College
- Percentage of Students Taking AP Courses and/or Percentage of Students Passing AP Courses
- Results on state accountability measures
- Charter School Academic and Non-Academic Goals
- NYC Progress Reports

1b. Mission and Academic Goals

Schools with successful missions and goals have many of the characteristics below:

- Have an animating mission statement that staff, students and community embrace
- Set ambitious academic and non-academic goals that entire school community knows and embraces
- Have processes for regular monitoring and reporting on progress toward school goals
- Have processes for adjusting strategies in support of goals as appropriate in response to monitoring data

Evidence for successful missions and goals might include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Mission statement, charter, external documents (parent and family handbooks, school website, etc.)
- Annual reports, school improvement plans, leadership board reports
- Board agendas and minutes
- Parent, student, and teacher satisfaction surveys
- Parent association meeting agendas and minutes
- Participation at parent-teacher conferences, school advocacy events, participation in academic goal related programs
- Stakeholder (board, parents, staff, students, etc.) interviews

1c. Responsive Education Program

Schools with successful education programs have many of the characteristics below:

- Are self-reflective and examine practice based on outcomes against goals
- Have well-thought out curricular programs that are aligned with NYS learning outcomes as described by state standards and the new Common Core Curriculum.
- Use instructional models and resources consistent with school mission and that are flexible in addressing the needs of all learners
- Offer defined opportunities for remediation and acceleration
- Have effective strategies and quality instructional programs for addressing students with special needs and ELLs
- Have defined strategies that they can measure and monitor for closing the achievement gap
- Implement a coherent and effective interim assessment system (e.g., use of formative, interim, and summative assessment data) for monitoring progress, predicting performance, and adjusting instruction
- Have an effective process for supporting improved classroom instruction, including frequent observation and feedback
- Use a defined process for evaluating curricular tasks, programs and resources for effectiveness and fit with school mission and goals
- Have school calendars and day schedules that provide the time necessary to deliver on the school's mission and academic goals

Evidence for successful education programs, in addition to positive results, may include, but not be limited to, many of the following:

- Instructional planning documents (alignments, scope and sequences, curriculum maps, unit and lesson plans, etc)
- Student/teacher schedules
- Classroom observations
- Student Intervention / Response to Intervention program description and resources

- Special Education/ELL progress monitoring documentation
- Interim assessment results
- Student and teacher portfolios
- Data findings; adjusted lesson plans
- Self-assessment documentation
- Professional development plans and resources
- School calendar and daily schedules
- DOE School Surveys and internal school satisfaction surveys
- Instructional leader and staff interviews

1d. Learning Environment

Schools with successful learning environments have many of the characteristics below:

- Have a strong academic culture that creates high academic and behavioral expectations in a way that motivates students to consistently give their best efforts
- Use a comprehensive approach to student management, including positive behavioral expectations and a clear discipline policy to build and sustain a safe, orderly, and supportive classroom environment
- Provide for safe, respectful, efficient transitions, hallways, cafeteria, yard, etc.
- Have classrooms where academic risk-taking and student participation is encouraged and supported
- Provide opportunities for students to actively engage in their own learning and in the life of the school
- Have a plan with formal or informal structures or programs in place that provide students opportunities to develop as individuals and citizens (for example: a character education, citizenship, or community involvement or service program)

Evidence for successful learning environments may include, but not be limited to, many of the following:

- School mission and articulated values
- School calendar and class schedules
- Student management plan (code of conduct, school values, discipline policy, positive incentive system, etc.)
- Student attendance and retention rates
- Student discipline data (referral, suspension, expulsion)
- DOE School Survey student results
- DOE School Survey parent and teacher safety and respect results
- Parent complaint/concern information
- Internal satisfaction survey results
- Leadership, staff, and, if appropriate, student interviews
- Classroom observations
- Scheduled student engagement opportunities (e.g., student advisory, internships, student government, student led conferences, peer tutoring, peer mediation, etc.)

2. Is the School a Fiscally Sound, Viable Organization?

2a. Governance Structure and Organizational Design

Schools with successful governance and organizational design structures have many of the characteristics below:

- Have a clearly articulated governance structure, compliant with its charter and all applicable laws and regulations, with clear lines of accountability for the Board, school leadership and all staff
- Have a capable Board of Trustees with appropriate officers, committees, and a purposeful blend of skills and experiences to provide oversight and strategic direction to fulfill the mission and goals of its charter
- Have a Board that is fully compliant with all applicable laws and regulations, particularly but not limited to open-meeting laws and conflict of interest regulations, and is fully compliant with its Board approved by-laws (number of meetings, quorum, posting of calendar, agenda and minutes)
- Have a defined process for Board reflection on effectiveness, assessing developing needs, and plan for professional growth
- Have developed a succession plan for board and school leadership, consistent with the charter and Board by-laws, to ensure continuity of direction and leadership over time and despite circumstance
- Implements a school leadership structure that is aligned with charter and that is sufficient to fulfill school's mission and achieve its accountability goals and, if and when necessary, makes timely adjustments to that structure with proper notice to and approval by its authorizer
- If applicable, school relationship with a charter management organization is identified in charter and supported by a management agreement that spells out services, responsibilities, accountability reporting, performance expectations, and fees
- Have timely and appropriate access to legal counsel
- Implements a process for recruiting, hiring, compensating, monitoring, and evaluating the effectiveness of the school's staff that is clearly defined in staff handbook
- Have instructional leadership staffing and support structures that holds staff accountable for student learning outcomes and provide regular feedback on instruction to teachers, including both formal and informal observations

Evidence for school governance and organizational design may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- School charter
- Board by-laws, roster, trustee resumes, calendar of meetings, meeting agenda and minutes
- Annual conflict of interest forms
- Board resources for evaluating school leadership and staff, including rubric/performance metrics
- Board resources for self-reflection and professional growth
- Board development plan
- Board interviews
- Staff roster, job descriptions, staff handbook, operations manual
- School calendar
- Professional development plan for leadership staff
- School leadership and staff interviews

2b. School Climate and Community Engagement

Schools with a sustaining school climate and engaged parent and community support have many of the characteristics below:

- Create and maintain a healthy professional school climate that is collaborative, student centered, and aligned with school mission and values
- Implement flexible, data-driven approach to professional development for all staff
- Encourage professional conversations about effective performance and quality instruction among staff, through, for example, such means as regular and periodic teaming (grade level teams, data days, etc.) and peer observations
- Have systems in place to evaluate professional development effectiveness and provide ongoing support for school-wide and individual initiatives
- Employ an effective means of measuring and monitoring core constituency satisfaction (parent, staff, and, when age appropriate, student), including, but not limited to, the DOE School Survey
- Have effective home-school communication practices and engagement strategies to ensure meaningful parent involvement in the learning of their children
- Engage parents actively in the life of the school, including advocacy, community engagement, and feedback on school policies and initiatives
- Develop strong community-based partnerships who support and advocate for the school
- Have a clear procedure for parents and staff to express concerns to school leadership and the Board, as appropriate, including a clearly articulated escalation path to authorizer

Evidence for school climate and community engagement may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- DOE School Survey satisfaction parent, teacher, and, if appropriate student results
- Internal satisfaction surveys
- Staff handbook
- Student retention and wait list data
- Staff retention data
- School Professional Development Plan and staff feedback on professional development events
- Resources for evaluations and observations, scheduled opportunities for professional collaboration, staff feedback on professional development events
- Leadership, staff, parent, student interviews
- Student and staff attendance rates
- Parent/Student Handbook
- Parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences
- Parent association meeting calendar and minutes
- Community partnerships and sponsored programs
- Parent and community feedback via public hearings, renewal calls to parents, etc.
- Community outreach documents (newsletters, announcements, invitations, etc.)

2c. Financial and Operational Health

Schools that are responsible stewards of public funds and effective, sustaining organizations have many of the characteristics below:

- Consistently meet student enrollment and retention targets
- Maintain annual budgets that meet all short- and long-term financial responsibilities with available revenues
- Provide rigorous oversight of financial and operational responsibilities, as school leadership and Board levels, in a manner that keeps the school's mission and academic goals central to short- and long-term decision-making

- Have clearly established policies and procedures for overall fiscal and operational health of the school (onboarding of all new staff, record-keeping, processing requests of HR services, application and enrollment calls, visitors, volunteers, etc.)
- Maintain effective internal controls of finances to ensure integrity of financial management and a proactive approach to mitigating risk
- Receive consistently clean financial audits
- If applicable, have strong, accountable partnerships with management organizations and other partners and significant vendors to support delivery of charter school design and academic program
- Ensure a safe, clean and appropriately resourced educational facility with all appropriate services specified in charter and mandated by appropriate law and regulations
- Have appropriate insurance coverage

Evidence for a financially sound, viable organization may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- School budget, P&Ls, and monthly/quarterly cash-flow reports
- Financial leader(s) job description, resume and accountability documents
- Financial and operational organizational chart
- Financial audits
- Contracts or Memos of Understanding (MOUs) for significant partnerships and vendor relationships
- Operational policies and procedures, including training resources
- Staff turnover and retention records
- Secure storage areas for student and staff records
- Policies/protocols for maintaining secure records
- Required facility documents (lease, certificate of occupancy, fire and safety inspections, etc.)
- School safety plan
- Appropriate insurance documents

3. Is the School in Compliance with its Charter and All Applicable Law and Regulations?

3a. Approved Charter and Agreement

Schools in substantial compliance with their charter and agreement have:

- Implemented the key features of their charter as described in the original charter and, if appropriate, as modified in approved revisions to their charter, including but not limited to mission, academic program, school organization, grade configuration, enrollment, goals, etc.
- Ensure that up-to-date charter is available on request to staff, parents, and school community
- Implemented comprehensive academic, behavioral, oversight, management, and operational policies and procedures that are substantially aligned with the charter and the school's stated mission and vision

Evidence for a school's compliance with the terms of its charter and charter agreement may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Authorized charter and signed agreement
- Charter revision request approval and documentation

- School mission
- School policies and procedures
- Annual Site Visit reports
- Board meetings, agendas and minutes
- Leadership, Board, staff and community interviews
- Public hearings (renewal or material revision hearings)

3b. Applicable Federal and State Law

Schools in substantial compliance with federal and state law:

- Meet all legal requirements for Title I and IDEA regulations and reporting
- Meet or exceed enrollment and retention targets for FRL, ELL and Special Education students to those of their district of location⁹ or are making documented good faith efforts to reach comparable percentages for enrollment and retention
- Implement school policies related to student discipline and promotion and retention that are fully compliant with laws and regulations related to students with disabilities and due process regulations
- Conduct an independently verified fair and open lottery and manage with integrity enrollment process and annual waiting lists
- Employ instructional staff with appropriate security clearances and certification requirements

Evidence for compliance with applicable federal and state law may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- School reporting documents
- School's Annual Report
- Student recruitment plan and resources
- Student management policies and promotion and retention policies
- Family/Student handbook
- Student discipline records
- Parent complaint/grievance records
- Lottery policy, resources, and records; enrollment procedures and records
- Demographic data (school, district, and other as appropriate)
- Staff roster, fingerprint clearance for all staff, certification status of all instructional staff

3c. Applicable Regulations

Schools in substantial compliance with applicable regulations have:

- Safe and secure facilities with no significant compliance concerns with applicable regulations
- Consistently clean annual audits, up-to-date escrow accounts, and have completed all other financial reporting as required
- Boards that meet requirements for size, meeting frequency, public notice, applicable open-meeting and conflict of interest regulations, as well as complying with NYC DOE CSAS's requirements for reporting changes in board membership and securing approval for new board members.
- Informed NYC DOE CSAS, and where required, received CSAS approval for changes in significant partnerships, such as dropping/replacing a management organization
- Effectively engaged parent associations

⁹ School-specific targets for enrollment and retention are to come from NY State Education Department

Evidence for compliance with applicable regulations may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- School or building safety plan; appropriate inspection documents
- Annual audits, escrow accounts, other financial reporting documents
- Board roster, calendar, agenda and minutes, conflict of interest documents, notification of changes/approval of new member request documents
- Charter revision requests, revised or new contracts
- Parent association calendar of meetings, identified officers, parent association agenda and minutes, parent satisfaction survey results
- Interviews with Board, staff, parents, students or others, as appropriate

4. What Are the School's Plans for its Next Charter Term?

4a. School Expansion or Model Replication

In anticipation of a new charter term schools may be considering various growth options: replication, expansion to new grades or increased enrollment or altering their model in some significant way. Successful schools generally have processes for:

- Conducting needs/opportunity assessments
- Forming Board and leadership committees or subcommittees to investigate options, develop action plans, ensure capacity and resources are aligned, etc.
- Engaging school community in articulating charter revisions (or a new charter in cases of replication) to address the proposed growth plans
- Ensuring that the final proposal is ambitious but realistic in its plans
- Creating a well-reasoned and documented prospective for the school's new charter term and, if applicable, a new charter proposal (for replication)

Evidence for likely success in planning for school growth in a new charter term may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Renewal application narrative, including performance results and analyses of the current charter term
- Renewal application revised charter submission, including mission, program description, governance, organization, budget, etc. for new term
- Charter (replication) Application
- Leadership and Board interviews

4b. Organizational Sustainability

Successful schools consistently perform despite change. While there is no single path for ensuring sustainability, successful schools often have the following features:

- School anticipates organizational opportunities/needs and plans for resource development (human resource policies for growing your own talent, for example, or fundraising or budget management to take care of anticipated capital needs and to mitigate risks for the unexpected, or board development to bring new talent or specific needs-based expertise to the school)

Evidence for organizational sustainability may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Renewal application narrative, including performance results and analyses of the current charter term
- Renewal application revised charter submission, including mission, program description, governance,

organization, budget, etc. for new term

- Board roster and resumes
- Board committees and minutes
- School organization chart
- Staff rosters
- Staff handbook
- Leadership and staff interviews
- Budget

4c. School or Model Improvements

Successful schools are thoughtful about the continued appropriateness of school design features and elements of their models. They:

- Review performance carefully and even if they don't make major changes through expansion or replication, they are careful to adjust elements to ensure continued and improved success.
- Develop plans to improve the school learning environment, including improving their facilities to expand program offerings and/or developing new partnerships to further the school's mission.

Evidence for successful improvements to a school's program or model may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Renewal application narrative, including performance results and analyses of the current charter term
- Renewal application revised charter submission, including mission, program description, governance, organization, budget, etc. for new term
- Leadership and board interviews
- Contracts or Memos of Understanding (MOUs) with partners or important vendors